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## Near East and South Asia Review

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Supplement  
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Articles



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Afghanistan in March

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Soviet and Afghan forces continued efforts to stem insurgent resupply and reinforcement activity during the last month of the winter, but the guerrillas probably have sufficient supplies to support the expected upsurge in fighting in early spring.

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*Some articles are preliminary views of a subject or speculative, but the contents normally will be coordinated as appropriate with other offices within CIA. Occasionally an article will represent the views of a single analyst; these items will be designated as noncoordinated views.*

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**Afghanistan in March**

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Soviet and Afghan forces continued efforts to stem insurgent resupply and reinforcement activity during the last month of winter. Poor weather occasionally interfered with operations, mostly curbing air support from Bagram. The Afghan army completed another series of semi-independent combat operations—their largest yet—in the vicinity of Jalalabad, Gardeyz, and Herat evidently without encountering significant resistance, although insurgent activities were at a moderate level during the month. The guerrillas probably have sufficient supplies to support the expected upsurge in fighting in early spring.

Soviet and Afghan forces made no appreciable headway during March against insurgents in the Herat area. Sources of the US Embassy in Kabul claim that fighting west of the city was particularly heavy early in the month.

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**Widespread Soviet Operations Continue**

Soviet operations in three border provinces—Paktia, Nangarhar, and Gardeyz—focused largely on attempting to cut guerrilla supply routes.

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Sources of the US Embassy in Kabul reported that Soviet units from Kabul conducted a five-day sweep in the Lowgar Valley along the road to Ghazni starting on 5 March. Despite interruptions caused by fog and late winter storms, Bagram-based ground attack aircraft flew multiple combat sorties in support of operations in eastern Afghanistan.

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**Independent Afghan Army Operations**

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Afghan army units increased their role in combat operations during March in the vicinity of Jalalabad, Gardeyz, and Herat.

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Soviet involvement was limited to perimeter security and air, artillery, and advisory support. The Kabul regime has come under pressure this year to play a more independent role, and the combat sweeps during March are the largest yet.

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Soviet forces continued operations around Qandahar city in early March.

The inability of the Soviets and Afghan regime to bring the city under control has been a major frustration for them. According to the US Embassy in Kabul, the Soviets strafed sections of the city during March and subsequently conducted house-to-house searches.

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the Afghan units evidently encountered no sustained resistance from guerrilla forces. Still, the Afghan military probably is not ready to assume a leading role in ground operations.

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**Insurgents Resurgent**

During March, insurgent forces pressed several Afghan army garrisons. The US Embassy in Kabul reported that the Afghan army garrison at Ali Kheyl was surrounded in late March and that the regime sent reinforcements to bolster the defenses of the garrison. The Embassy also indicates that insurgents increased harassment of Afghan army and border garrisons along the northern boundary of the Spin Gar mountains in Nangarhar Province. [REDACTED]

In mid-March, Panjsher Valley insurgents launched attacks against Soviet and Afghan garrisons at Anawa, Bazarak, and Rokheh but with inconclusive results, according to US Embassy sources. In addition, an Afghan column was attacked near Gardeyz on 16 March resulting in the capture of 35 Afghan troops. [REDACTED]

The insurgents' success in shooting down as many as five helicopters in the Kabul area evidently has been disconcerting to the Soviets. [REDACTED]

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**Outlook**

Because of the apparent Soviet and Afghan failure to curtail significantly insurgent infiltration and resupply activity this winter, the insurgents probably are adequately equipped to sustain at least the opening phases of the spring campaign. Preparations for that fighting are now under way. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Soviets probably intend for more Afghans to be on the frontlines when springtime offensives start, but regime forces are still incapable of taking over the war effort. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Other attempts noted during the month to thwart the guerrilla surface-to-air missile threat included having MI-24 Hind D helicopters fly low-altitude escorts for vulnerable Soviet air transport aircraft using Kabul airport. [REDACTED]

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